

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

12-23-04

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name **The Narragansett**

other names/site number

2. Location

street & number **1640 East Fiftieth Street**

____ Not for publication

city or town **Chicago**

____ vicinity

state **Illinois** code **IL** county **Cook** code **031** zip code **60615**

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ____ nationally ____ statewide locally. (____ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Wm. Clark, SHPO
Signature of certifying official

12-21-04
Date

Illinois Historic Preservation Agency

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria. (____ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

American Indian Tribe

The Narragansett
Name of Property

Cook County, Illinois
County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other (explain):	_____	_____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
 public-local
 public-State
 public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
 district
 site
 structure
 object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u> 1 </u>	<u> 0 </u> buildings
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u> sites
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u> structures
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u> objects
<u> 1 </u>	<u> 0 </u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)
N/A

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6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/multiple dwelling

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/multiple dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Art Deco
Other: Skyscraper

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation **Concrete**

Roof

Walls **Limestone**
 Concrete

other

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See Continuation Sheets

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance **1928-1930** Significant Dates **1928-1930**

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) **N/A**

Cultural Affiliation **N/A**

Architect/Builder **Leichenko and Esser, architects**
Morgan, Charles Leonard, architect/artist

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.) **See Continuation Sheet**

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9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository **Art Institute of Chicago-Burnham Library**

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property **.30**

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	16	451431	4628031	3	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

See Continuation Sheet

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

See Continuation Sheet

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**The Narragansett
1640 East Fiftieth Street
Chicago, Cook County, Illinois**

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY

The Narragansett, located at 1640 East Fiftieth Street in Chicago, is a soaring 22-story luxury skyscraper apartment building in the Art Deco style. Constructed from 1928-1930, the building was designed by the Chicago architectural firm of Leichenko and Esser. It is one of five 1920s-era apartment house designs in the Chicago Beach Development, an area locked between the Illinois Central Railroad Tracks (now Metra Electric Line) and Chicago's Lake Shore Drive in the Kenwood neighborhood.

LOCATION AND SETTING

The Narragansett is located in the Kenwood community area, a neighborhood on Chicago's south side that is approximately five miles south and east of the Loop. Kenwood is bounded by 43rd Street on the north, Hyde Park Boulevard (51st Street) on the south, Lake Michigan on the east, and Cottage Grove on the west. The area is served by the former Illinois Central Railroad (now Metra Electric Line) that first arrived at Kenwood in 1859.

Land use in the Kenwood neighborhood of Chicago is principally residential, mostly single family homes and low, multi-family apartment buildings. In the area east of the Illinois Central tracks, where the Narragansett Apartments is located, there is a greater number of high-rise apartment buildings which give it a somewhat different character than the rest of the neighborhood. The area is isolated between the Illinois Central Tracks to the west and Lake Shore Drive and parkland along Lake Michigan to the east. This area initially was developed in the 1920s when better class apartment buildings were constructed in the eastern portion of Kenwood, and soon became a highly desired luxury residential district within the city. Five historic tall apartment buildings were constructed in this part of Kenwood, originally known as the Chicago Beach, between 1926 and 1930. The Narragansett, when paired with its neighbor the Powhatan Apartments, clearly expresses the character of 1920s high-rise development along the south lakefront in Kenwood. After 1950, construction resumed in Chicago Beach, where numbers of high-rise apartment buildings rose from former vacant lots.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

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EXTERIOR

The Narragansett is a 22-story, modernistic skyscraper apartment building in the Art Deco style with an irregular plan. Its primary facades face south and east and are highly detailed in limestone and brick, while its secondary facades face north and west and are of plain brick. The first three floors of the building are clad in ashlar block limestone, with a variety of high relief limestone sculptures. Brick piers on the upper floors emphasize the building's verticality, while terra cotta spandrels separate the six over one double hung sash on each floor. The primary entrance is on the south façade along 50th Street and has a decorative metal canopy.

The limestone base wraps around both principal facades. The pattern of window openings on the first floor of the base is distinctive. There are five single window openings on the south façade and six single window openings on the south portion of the east façade. In the recessed part of the east façade, there are both paired windows and single window openings; as well as a four part window on the projecting bay that faces south. Some of the single windows and the four-part window have a geometric stone border topped with a stylized arch. The principal entry to the building is on the south façade, off-center. The pattern of window openings on the second and third floors is the same. On the south façade there are three bays of three windows each, and one bay of two windows. There is a geometric border around the two middle window groupings, and decorative stone panels between the floors. The center of these panels has a pineapple motif. On the south portion of the east façade there are single window openings that are aligned with the first floor. Two of these have the pineapple motif. In the recessed portion of the east façade the paired windows align with the first floor, while there is a three-part window in the center, with the same border and decorative stone panels between the second and third floors as those found on the south facade. The projecting bay has four individual windows. There is a stone stringcourse that tops the base of the building. Stylized terra cotta elephant sculptures stand atop this stone course in the spaces between the window groupings. These elephants form the base for the vertical piers that rise and separate the window bays on the upper floors.

The window pattern on floors four through 22 is the same. On the south façade there are three bays of three windows each and one bay of two windows. On the south portion of the east façade there is a single window opening, and then four single window openings. In the recessed portion of the east façade, there is a bay of two windows, a bay of three windows, and then a bay of two windows. The projecting bay that faces south has four windows. Separating the groupings of

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windows on both facades are continuous yellow brick vertical piers with a profile that has indentations. Separating the individual windows within each grouping are terra cotta tiles with vertical grooves. These elements contribute to the building's soaring verticality.

The spandrels between the fourth and fifth floor windows have decorative square terra cotta panels centered in a black terra cotta frame. There are nine different panels, designed by Charles Morgan, including one panel of a curvilinear Tree of Life; three panels of the faces of Native Americans including two profiles of chiefs, one looking left and one looking right, and a maiden facing forward; one panel of the full figure of a male Native American kneeling with a bow and arrow; four panels of animals, a pegasus resting with a rainbow, a pegasus leaping in the sun and over saturn, a deer leaping with the moon and stars, and two loving deer in one panel with a mountainous background and teepee. On the south façade they are arranged from left to right as follows: First window bay -- rainbow pegasus, Tree of Life, two deer; second window bay -- sun pegasus, Tree of Life, moon deer; third window bay -- right-facing chief, maiden, left-facing chief; fourth window bay -- two Trees of Life. On the south portion of the east façade they are arranged from left to right as follows: maiden, sun pegasus, rainbow pegasus, two deer, moon deer. On the recessed portion of the east façade they are arranged from left to right as follows: first window bay -- two Trees of Life; second window bay -- right facing chief, maiden, left facing chief; third window bay -- two Trees of Life. On the projecting bay that faces south the panels are as follows: rainbow pegasus, sun pegasus, moon deer, two deer.

The spandrels between all the floors above the fifth floor are flat, glazed terra cotta panels with an abstract, black linear design on a red background, fabricated in three sections. There are three different designs. They are arranged on the south façade from left to right as follows: first, second, and third window bays -- 1,2,3; fourth window bay -- 1,2. On the south portion of the east façade they are arranged as follows: 2 in the single opening; 1,2,2,3, in the first window bay. In the recessed part of the east façade they are arranged as follows: first window bay -- 1,3; second window bay -- 1,2,3; third window bay -- 1,3. In the projecting bay facing south they are arranged 1,2,2,3.

The top of the building is finished with a limestone and terra cotta parapet wall. There is an elaborate diagonal design that forms visual peaks over each window. There are also diagonal caps on the brick piers at the roof level. There is a small, roof-top penthouse that is not visible from the street.

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The west façade of the building has a flat brick section to the west with a single window on each floor in the center of the façade that is in the bathrooms of the apartments. Presumably the architects were anticipating additional construction adjacent to this part of the façade. It is currently a parking lot. The recessed section of the west façade has various windows facing west that are generally in bathrooms, kitchens, and service areas. There are two large fire escapes that zig zag down the west façade in this recessed area. In this same area, on a portion of the façade facing east, there is a three-part projecting bay and a three-part flat window, both in principal rooms. The north façade is flat brick, with five single window openings and a pair of windows per floor. There are no ornamental elements on this façade.

INTERIOR

The design and finishes of the interior public spaces are rich, combining traditional and modern design elements. The front entry to the apartments has a pair of multi-light wood panel doors with transoms that all have diagonal leading in the glass. The doors lead into a small vestibule with a tile floor, marble paneling on the walls, and an elaborate plaster crown molding with a geometric design. The mailroom is to the right. Through another pair of doors one enters the main lobby, which has an ample reception area with the elevator to the A and B tier apartments, and then a long corridor to a smaller rear lobby with the elevator to the C tier apartments. A small room in the southwest corner of the first floor is now a meeting room with no historic finishes; it is marked on the original plans as a handball court. In the rear of the building behind the rear lobby is a janitor's apartment.

The lobbies and corridor all have terrazzo floors with a multi-colored octagonal pattern with pinwheel insets and a parquet-like border. The baseboards are marble. The walls have fluted wood panels from floor to ceiling and wood veneer panels inset with diamond graining. An elaborate cornice has a decorative frieze of alternating foliated and spiral designs. The plaster coffered ceiling is divided into various geometric sections by moldings, and there are center panels in each section with various foliated and circular motifs. The fireplace on the west wall of the reception area has a simple marble, classical mantelpiece, surround and hearth, and a decorative and elaborate, sculptural wrought iron screen. Chandeliers and light sconces in these areas are chrome with frosted glass and have pineapple leaf finials and Art Deco-style brackets. Elevators have triple-arched moldings above the doorways and metal screens above that. Along the long corridor that leads from

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the front reception area to the rear lobby is a row of stained glass windows. They are casements with transoms and arched tops.

There are just three apartments per floor of approximately 1450-1700 square feet each. To afford privacy for the individual units, there are two separate elevators and small elevator lobbies on each floor. An elevator just off the front reception area serves the two front apartments, A and B, while another elevator in the rear serves the rear unit, C. Each is a two-bedroom unit with an irregular layout. Rooms are clustered around a central hall or gallery.

Apartment A is in the southwest corner of the building. The entry hall or gallery has a wood beamed ceiling with decorative foliated brackets, and wood rope moldings at the frieze line. An arched entry doorway with French doors leads into the dining room. There are corner built-in cabinets with broken pediments flanking the entry, paneled lower walls and a crown molding. The kitchen is off the dining room. Diagonally across the gallery from the entry to the dining room is a larger arched opening to the living room. There is a fireplace, parquet floors, and crown moldings in this room. Two bedrooms, each with a private bath, are located in the other corners of the apartment.

Apartment B is in the southeast corner of the building. From the elevator lobby one enters the side of a long gallery with a vaulted ceiling. The living room and dining room are located at opposite ends of this long hall. The two bedrooms, each having a private bath, are connected by a secondary hall. The kitchen is behind the dining room. Features include a fireplace in the living room with a flat, but Georgian-like wood mantelpiece, parquet floors, crown moldings, and paneling and picture moldings in the dining room.

Apartment C has a small, private elevator lobby. The gallery has a barrel-vaulted ceiling with geometric moldings. The living room is accessed through a segmental arched opening at the end of the gallery opposite the main entry. The dining room is accessed through a similar arched opening on one side of the gallery. The bedrooms and bathrooms are reached through a private rear hall. Features include a fireplace, parquet floors, and crown moldings.

INTEGRITY

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The Narragansett retains excellent original integrity both inside and out. All masonry and terra cotta elements remain in place as constructed, and extensive repairs are underway of masonry units damaged over the years. No sculptural decorative elements appear to have been removed. There are no changes to window or door openings on the principal facades. The only significant change to the exterior is that some windows, primarily on secondary facades, have been replaced with vinyl and in configurations other than six over one.

The first floor public spaces remain virtually unchanged. The exception is the first floor meeting room that in plan seems to have once been a handball court. Most historic materials are in place, including floor, wall, and ceiling finishes, doors, windows, lighting fixtures, and hardware. A representative sample of apartments was visited. Of those seen, apartment plans were intact and most materials and finishes appeared to be original. All wood trim in the units visited are painted. Noticeable alterations occurred mainly in the kitchens and bathrooms.

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The Narragansett
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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

SUMMARY

The Narragansett Apartments at 1640 East Fiftieth Street in Chicago, Illinois, meets National Register of Historic Places Criterion C for its significance as a fine example of the Art Deco style as applied to multi-family residential architecture. The building exhibits soaring verticality as is found in Art Deco skyscraper design. But it is especially notable for quality craftsmanship and its polychromatic terra cotta ornament designed by artist and architect, Charles Morgan, and created by the American Terra Cotta Company. The building is an innovative, better-class apartment building in Chicago's south side Kenwood community area. Built as part of the Chicago Beach Development of the late 1920s, the Narragansett represents an era of apartment house construction in Chicago when booming population growth, rising property values, locational pressures, and demand for luxurious residences drove building heights upward. The Narragansett was featured in the February 5, 1929 issue of *American Architect* and in R.W. Sexton's 1929 book, *American Apartment Houses, Hotels, and Apartment Hotels of Today* as a modern apartment house design that successfully met its requirements. Designed in 1928 by the Chicago architectural firm of Leichenko and Esser, the building has been recognized for its architectural significance in both the Chicago Historic Resources Survey (orange rated) and the Illinois Historic Structures Survey (P rated). Converted to condominiums in 1966-67, the building retains most of its original integrity in design and materials.

THE TALL, LUXURY URBAN APARTMENT BUILDING IN CHICAGO

The Narragansett Apartments represents an era of residential construction in Chicago when luxurious tall, multi-family buildings emerged along Chicago's lakefront. These 1920s buildings later evolved into the high-rise apartment buildings that are so prevalent today along Lake Shore Drive on both the north and south sides of Chicago. Although the apartment building, as a building type, evolved to meet the needs of a rapidly increasing population in the 1870s and 1880s it only became accepted as a residential choice for upper class families beginning in the early 20th century. As apartments became a suitable choice for luxury living, Chicago experienced an apartment boom in the early part of the 20th century. The highest yearly ratio of

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construction of apartment units to detached single family homes in Chicago (6.8 to 1) was reached at the time the Narragansett was designed in 1928. (Condit, p. 157)¹

Although apartment buildings did exist throughout Chicago's neighborhoods in the early 20th century, the majority were three to four story walk-up buildings. Along Chicago's lakefront, however, a concentration of high-rise, luxury apartment buildings soon developed. The 1910s and 1920s brought about a new elegant urban lifestyle, with dwellers residing in luxurious apartments constructed in highly desirable lakefront locations in the city such as in the Gold Coast, in north side neighborhoods along Lincoln Park, and in the Hyde Park and Kenwood neighborhoods on the south side. The tall apartment building, like the early 20th century tall office building, was the result of rising property values that encouraged dense development on small parcels, and zoning laws that permitted these lofty heights.

Chicago's most celebrated apartment buildings are located in the Gold Coast or Streeeterville area of Chicago. Carl Condit, in his book *Chicago 1910-1929: Building, Planning and Urban Technology*, believed that "by far, the most elegant, the most expensive, and the most magnificently sited are the buildings of the Gold Coast, the solid strip of luxury that extends along the water's edge..." (Condit, p. 158) While the "Gold Coast" or "Streeeterville" area evolved into one of the most desirable addresses for apartment dwellers, developers on Chicago's south side began contemplating another fashionable apartment area, in "Chicago Beach." Similarities between the two areas are notable including attractive location, beaches, scenic views along the lake, and the fights over riparian rights. Although the Hyde Park-Kenwood neighborhood had similar advantages as those found along the Gold Coast, it was removed by five miles from the Chicago Loop and served by rail. With the construction of the new Leif Erickson Drive in the late 1920s (now called South Lake Shore Drive), developers were given an opportunity to open up new lands in the Chicago Beach district that could rival their successful counterparts on the north.

¹ According to Randall in the *History of Chicago Building*, p. 298, in 1928 there were 4,381 individual homes to 29,945 apartment units; 1929 there were 2,973 to 13,146 and when the depression affected construction in 1930 there were 1,088 homes to 1,487 apartment units.

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APARTMENT BUILDINGS AND THE CHICAGO BEACH DEVELOPMENT

The Chicago Beach Development, located between 48th Street, Cornell Avenue, Chicago Beach Drive, and Hyde Park Boulevard, became one of the premier apartment districts on Chicago's south lakefront during the late 1920s. On property owned by the Chicago Beach Hotel, numerous upscale apartment buildings were constructed between 1927 until the Depression halted construction a few years later. The Chicago Beach Hotel, first built in 1892 and demolished in 1968, was once considered one of Chicago's finest luxury resort hotels. Located at 51st Street and Hyde Park Boulevard, this lakeside guest and residential hotel was initially built to accommodate visitors to the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893.

Over the years, the lakefront hotel accumulated over 12 acres in the Hyde Park-Kenwood neighborhood through various acquisitions, including riparian rights. The hotel property, much of which was created through the build-up of sand and other fill, had become controversial with the city's planners who saw the south lakefront as having a higher public purpose. The South Park Commissioners began, in 1910, to challenge accretions by private owners along the south lakefront in anticipation of creating recreational improvements. When the South Park Commissioners of Chicago proposed plans in the 1920s to construct Leif Erickson Drive (now known as South Lake Shore Drive), Burnham Park, and a continuous group of islands to connect Grant and Jackson Parks, the Chicago Beach Hotel agreed to exchange their riparian rights for title to an additional nine acres of adjacent and buildable lands.²

The additional land holdings prompted the Beach Hotel Company, led by investment bankers Ronald F. Brunswick and John E. O'Connell of Brunswick, O'Connell and Company, to develop their property into "one of the most attractive and strategically located apartment and hotel districts in the world."³ Touting rapid transportation to and from Chicago's Loop on the nearby Illinois Central Line and on the new boulevard under construction along the lakefront, the company hoped to attract builders of upper-class high rise apartment buildings to the area. At this time, the Chicago Beach Development was proclaimed the south side version of Chicago's north side "Streeterville" area, an established and fashionable hotel and apartment house district.

² Barton, p. 2.

³ As reported in "Will Rival Old Deestric of Cap Streeter," Chicago Tribune, November 7, 1926.

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The Beach Hotel Company began to market their property while embarking on its own addition and expansion. In late 1926, the company publicly announced its plans for the Chicago Beach Development. Keeping four acres for their new swimming pool and tennis courts, the Beach Hotel Company subdivided 21 acres surrounding the hotel into eight blocks with a total of 46 lots.⁴ Two new north-south thoroughfares were added that connected Cornell and Hyde Park Boulevard. The area was also improved with sewage lines and drainage. In order to control development and protect their interests, restrictions were placed upon properties within the subdivision. Parcels could only be improved with rental or co-operative apartments. Co-operative apartments were preferred by the Beach Hotel Company, which hoped to create a "dignified residence section."⁵ Although dignified, the buildings could also be tall. The developers were able to secure zoning changes in 1928 that permitted buildings in this new section from 50th to 56th Streets to be 24 stories high without any stepping back, with the possibility of constructing a building up to 40 stories in height. This change allowed for high-rise buildings and larger investments along the south lakefront. The resulting development in Chicago Beach greatly contrasted with the bulk of the existing Kenwood neighborhood, a former railroad suburb of Chicago that had mostly been developed with single-family homes.

The first project in the Chicago Beach Development was 5000 East End Avenue, a 27-story co-operative apartment building with 96 apartments of five, six and seven rooms each.⁶ Designed in the Gothic Revival style by Robert S. DeGolyer in 1927 and completed in 1928, this high-end apartment building was built on a 107x140 lot on the southwest corner of East End Avenue and Fiftieth Street. A syndicate headed by Meyer Fridstein, James J. Carroll and Winfield H. Schendorf invested a total of \$2,600,000 in the 5000 East End Avenue project.⁷

By September 1928, the roadbed was laid for Leif Erickson Drive (South Lake Shore Drive). It was around this time that the second and third projects within the Chicago Beach Development were underway. The Powhatan Building Corporation⁸ was constructing a 22-story building with 98 co-operative apartments of seven or nine rooms each at the northwest corner of Fiftieth Street and Chicago Beach Drive. The Powhatan Apartments, designed by architect Robert S.

⁴ According to property records, the Chicago Beach Addition, a subdivision, was recorded on April 16, 1927.

⁵ "Work Goes Fast on New Homes Section: Chicago Beach Development Gets Zoning Privilege; sell one lot." *Hyde Park Herald*, July 29, 1927, p. 9.

⁶ 5000 East End Avenue Building Corporation incorporated on August 31, 1927.

⁷ "Chicago Beach a \$200,000 Project." *The Economist*, December 8, 1928, p. 1350.

⁸ The Powhatan Building Corporation was incorporated on July 22, 1927.

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DeGolyer, was developed by the same syndicate as the Narragansett Apartments, constructed just to the west of the Powhatan in the following year. These two stone, Art Deco-style skyscraper residential buildings are not just adjacent to each other ; they relate in the way they express the architectural vocabulary of the modernistic period, refine architectural quality, and advance luxury apartment plans. The Powhatan was designated a City of Chicago landmark in 1993.

The 20-story Barclay Apartments, with 98 rental suites, became the third project within Chicago Beach. This building, located at 4940 East End Avenue, was designed by architect B. Leo Steif in 1928 and was completed in 1929. Apartments in the Barclay were comprised of three, four and five rooms each.

An area marketing campaign was key to the successful occupancy of the apartment buildings in the Chicago Beach Development in the late 1920s. *The Economist* in Chicago reported the Chicago Beach sales campaign in December 1928:

Salability of apartments was enhanced considerably by the location, the property being the first available for improvement on the lake front south of the Central Business District and, through superior transportation facilities, being only nine minutes from the Loop. Floor plans were given careful consideration before construction was begun and were analyzed primarily from a renting standpoint in order to insure a popular response. Apartments were made medium-sized, in order to appeal to the average apartment occupant. Corner locations of buildings assured outside light for all rooms.⁹

The Chicago Beach Development, with its upscale apartment buildings, became an important part of the improvement of the south lakefront in the 1920s. Two other buildings, including the Narragansett (1928-30) and 5000 Cornell Avenue (1929-30), were constructed as the fourth and fifth apartment buildings in Chicago Beach just before the effects of the Depression were felt. By the end of 1929, the *Economist* reported that more than half of the entire Chicago Beach subdivision was either improved or "in the hands of those who contemplated improvement."¹⁰ The Beach Hotel Company sold their interest in the largest part of the remaining, vacant subdivision land in November 1929 to Charles E. Fox and the Hyde Park

⁹ "Chicago Beach a \$200,000 Project." *The Economist*, December 8, 1928, p. 1350.

¹⁰ "Large Tract in Chicago Beach Sold to Syndicate." *The Economist*, November 9, 1929, p. 1085.

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Investment Company.¹¹ Although plans were announced in April 1929 for a sixth building within Chicago Beach, the proposed 18-story building at 4924 Cornell Avenue was never built. The Depression halted further development until construction resumed in Chicago Beach in the early 1950s. The Chicago Beach Hotel was later re-used as an army hospital in World War II and then an army headquarters. It was demolished for what is now Regents Park, a \$14 million apartment complex completed in 1972 and designed by Dubin Dubin Black & Moutoussamy. Although the Chicago Beach Hotel is gone, the impact of the Beach Hotel Company on the history of the Kenwood community is present in the cluster of tall apartment buildings that rise along the south lakefront.

THE NARRAGANSETT APARTMENTS

The Narragansett Apartments became the fourth major apartment building project within the 1920s Chicago Beach Development. On March 1, 1928, Frank E. Grobner purchased a 100 x 125 building site from the Beach Hotel Company, owners of the Chicago Beach subdivision. Frank E. Grobner represented a syndicate that was to develop a 21-story co-operative apartment building known as the Narragansett Apartments. The property, located on the south side of Fiftieth Street, between East End Avenue and Chicago Beach Drive, was adjacent to the Powhatan Apartments that was underway just to the east of Narragansett site. On August 21, 1928, the 1640 East Fiftieth Street Corporation was incorporated and title to the property officially transferred from Frank E. Grobner to the building corporation. One week later, the *Economist* reported that a new building was to be constructed in Chicago Beach:

Plans have been announced for another tall co-operative apartment building to be erected on the Chicago Beach properties. It will be a 21-story structure of 60 five- and six-room suites to be known as the Narragansett Apartments, which the 1640 East Fiftieth Street Building Corporation will erect on the 76x125 (lot) at 1638 to 1644 East Fiftieth Street from plans by Leichenko and Esser. Garard Trust Company has underwritten the loan of \$900,000 for 13 years at 6 percent on the project, which represents an investment of \$1,500,000. The corporation took title to the property by quitclaim from Frank E. Grobner. The officers of the corporation are William J. Friedman, president, and John J. Abt, secretary.¹²

¹¹ The vacant parcel was 160,000 square feet or 1/5 of the total subdivision area.

¹² "More Tall Apartments Planned on Chicago Beach." *The Economist*, July 28, 1928, p. 222, col. 3

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On November 30, 1928, a building permit was issued for an apartment building at 1638-40 East Fiftieth Street. Work was begun on the building in January of 1929 by contractor Charles B. Johnson and Son, with the help of many subcontractors, and completed by March 31, 1930. By the time of the 1930 census on April 14, 1930, there were 14 families with 41 people living in the 63-unit Narragansett Apartments. The building did attract residents of the middle to upper classes, with heads of households engaged as professionals or proprietors. Examples of positions held by residents in 1930 include a corporate attorney, a treasurer of a trust company, a manufacturing agent, an accountant for a corporation, a railroad purchasing agent, a space seller for a newspaper, an assistant manager of a steel corporation, a vice-president of parking, and a proprietor of a warehouse. At this time the apartment building did have a live-in janitor, Swedish-born Ivan Anderson.

Some of the known residents of the Narragansett over the years have included: Brigadier General Joseph E. Barzynski (d. 1972), commandant of the Chicago Quartermaster Depot; Eric E. Wright (d. 1943), assistant vice president of the New York Central Railroad system; Robert R. Dunn (d. 1940), vice president of the General American Transportation Corporation; William J. Flaherty ((d. 1962), president of the Federal Pipe and Supply Company; Benjamin G. Clanton (d. 1972), an attorney for 61 years and a former republican candidate for state senator in 1942; Albert F. Meisterheim (d. 1967), owner of the Meisterheim Paper Company and past president of Olympia Fields Country Club.

The depression did have an effect on occupancy and caused the 1640 East Fiftieth Street Corporation to lose control of the Narragansett in January 1932 to the bond holders of the Garard Trust Company, who held the mortgage. After the effects of the depression waned, the building did later bounce back.

Although the Narragansett Apartments started out as a cooperative building, it currently is a condominium building. Soon after the condominium form of ownership was first adopted in Illinois in 1963, the Narragansett was one of the earliest condominium conversions in the City of Chicago. Between 1963 (the year of adoption) and 1967 (when the Narragansett was first converted to condos), a total of 3,574 condominium units were created within the City of

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Chicago.¹³ The Narragansett was featured in an article in the Chicago Tribune on July 23, 1967 as an example of successful conversion with over 1/3 of the 63 units sold between a short four-month period. As a testament to its designers, this 1929 tall apartment building was able to endure through the years in Chicago's ever-changing and unpredictable real estate market¹⁴

THE DESIGN OF THE TALL, LUXURY APARTMENT BUILDING

Most Chicagoans in the 19th century, unlike New Yorkers or Parisians, were not accustomed to living in multi-family dwellings, no matter how luxurious. They preferred the privacy of single-family homes surrounded by greenery in a small-town-like setting. Nevertheless, population and land valuation pressures forced the introduction of multi-family apartment and flat construction to Chicago in the late 19th century. Those who could not afford their own homes were often compelled to live in dark, cramped quarters in apartment buildings. This prejudice lasted until the arrival of a more palatable apartment after 1900, that catered to the desires of the better classes and shared qualities that were embraced in the detached, single-family home.

C. W. Westfall has placed apartment construction in Chicago into three eras between 1880 and 1930, each era attempting to appeal to Chicagoans and emulate some aspect of residential affluence (Westfall, *Home at the Top*, p. 21). In the first period, from 1871 through 1893, apartment buildings, mostly two- to three-story flats, were disguised to look like large single-family homes on the exterior to appeal to Chicagoans' small-town tastes. Larger apartment buildings were harder to disguise as homes, so architects used stately men's clubs or hotels as their models. It was during this era that Chicago's first tall, high-class apartment building was designed by architects Treat & Foltz and built at State and Ontario in 1880 (Westfall, *Home at the Top*, p. 24-25).

In the second phase, from 1893 through 1918, the influence of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago showed that a city could be dense and urban and still beautiful. Historic Revival styles of architecture gained new appreciation and were used to express domesticity

¹³ Annual Condominium Units Created in the City of Chicago by Township, 1963-1977. Table 1 in *Condominium Conversions in Chicago: Facts and Issues* by Shlaes and Company, July 1979.

¹⁴ "2 Tell Success in Converting Apartments to Condominiums." Chicago Tribune, July 23, 1967.

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on the exterior of the large courtyard and apartment blocks that would line the city's streets. In this era of apartment building construction, wealthy Chicagoans began to accept the apartment building as a suitable place of residence. The finest and earliest example of new luxury apartment living was found in the Pattington Apartments, begun in 1902 in Chicago's fashionable north side Uptown neighborhood. This groundbreaking courtyard apartment building catered to upper-middle-class families with six-room, 1400-square foot units to nine-room, 2500-square foot units around two open, landscaped yards. It was also during this era that the foremost architect of apartments of the better class, Benjamin Marshall, in 1900, produced his first luxury tall apartment building, the Raymond. Innovative in plan, the Raymond provided the model for apartment layouts with its orderly hierarchy of public, private and service areas. This reordering of the apartment plan hints to the downstairs public-space and upstairs private-space separation in a single-family dwelling. The plan of the Raymond was perfected by Benjamin Marshall in the nine-story Marshall Building of 1905, the first apartment building on North Lake Shore Drive in the fashionable Streeterville/Gold Coast district. Each apartment in the Marshall Building was spacious and filled a full floor, with public rooms (reception hall, living room, dining room) at the front, private spaces (bedrooms and baths) in a row along one side and service areas in a parallel row, on the other side, separated by a long hall (Westfall, *From Homes to Towers*, p. 278). Through this orderly plan, architect Benjamin Marshall set the standard for luxury apartment arrangements in the years to come.

The Narragansett is part of the third major period of apartment design in Chicago, from 1918 through the early 1930s. Several changes in local regulations contributed to the development of the skyscraper apartment building that became a prevalent apartment type during this period. First was the change in Illinois statutes in 1919 and 1922 which established the legal mechanism for cooperative apartments, allowing residents more control over building design and maintenance through ownership. Then in 1923, with Chicago's first zoning ordinance, increased allowable density on small, choice sites dictated that construction go up. Following precedent in New York's zoning law of 1916, additional stories were permitted if they did not exceed one-sixth of the building's cubic volume and complied with related setback requirements.¹⁵ As a result, the 1920s introduced the concept of the soaring, isolated building, often standing apart from its neighbors. Sometimes they were erected quickly and plainly, with the only concern being to maximize profits. However when handled by skillful designers, the skyscraper apartment building could provide visual delight and appeal to wealthy Chicagoans

¹⁵ Zukowsky, Introduction in *The Sky's the Limit*, p. 11.

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seeking a luxurious yet simpler housing choice than that of a traditional single family home on a suburban estate.

The tall apartment building shared many of the same exterior design issues as in the tall office building. Architects of skyscraper apartment buildings applied the concepts first introduced by Louis Sullivan in 1896 in *The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered* to address the problems of aesthetics. Sullivan advocated that an architect should allow a tall building to express its rising verticality, but introduce horizontal divisions to the façade based on the divisions of a classical column: base (the lower stories of the building), shaft (uninterrupted series of window tiers), and capital (the crown of the uppermost stories of the building). The first few stories of a tall apartment building were designed as a base, where the front entry was emphasized and architectural features such as columns, pilasters, arched entries and groupings of windows could be grasped on a human scale. The floors of the base would often hold the public spaces of the apartment building such as the lobby, elevator bays, storage, meeting space, and laundry. Above this base the tower soared, frequently stressing its verticality, and housing the residential units of the building. Above the tower's shaft, there might be some visual closure at the top either with an actual cornice if in a classical style, or perhaps a different design treatment for the top floor windows in a contemporary-style structure. The exterior of the Narragansett shows the tripartite division of the tall building, with base (floors one to three), shaft (floors 4-21) and capital (22 and above). The capital is not as clearly distinguished as the other two divisions, mainly because the architects wished to continue the Art Deco verticality of the structure by continuing the brick piers found between the windows.

Although Sullivan's aesthetic concepts could be applied, the greatest challenge for architects of the tall apartment building was that the exterior form was mostly dictated by the necessities of the interior plan. This became a modern problem, as architects were inserting a residential plan into a building type principally used for office and commercial uses: the skyscraper. The need for natural light and ventilation in all rooms, and for pleasing views from the public spaces, led to L-, H-, U-, or other irregularly shaped footprints with multiple projecting window bays and recesses. Unlike tall commercial or office buildings in Chicago's Loop, it would be difficult to contain a tall apartment building on a rectangular site built to the lot line. So instead of fitting residential uses into a commercial prototype skyscraper, the most creative of the residential architects first created a layout of apartment floor plans, and designed an exterior skin around the form this plan suggested. In the Narragansett, the architects Leichenko and

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Esser, had the freedom to create a freestanding building with an irregular footprint. Projecting bay windows and recessed facades were wrapped around the design, allowing for high levels of lighting and ventilation, exceptional views, and pleasant, workable apartment floor plans.

For the skyscraper's skin, most architects followed domestic conventions that were well accepted in Chicago, using historic revival style ornamentation such as Gothic or Tudor Revival, or frequently some variation of Classical Revival styling. Buildings in the later 1920s such as the Powhatan and the Narragansett in Chicago Beach, looked to more modernistic styles such as Art Deco for stylistic inspiration.

The success of the design of the tall apartment was based on its plan, and often times the interior became much more important than the exterior of the building. In the public spaces of the building, interior circulation consisted of a formal entry lobby leading to one or more sets of elevators. Since the public entrance hall gave an initial impression of the building, more money was spent on the vestibule and lobby for high quality materials and finishes. Other public spaces such as meeting rooms and lounges could be included usually at the base of the building or on the top floors, trimmed with the stylistic details of the architectural style used on the exterior. The Narragansett reached success in its highly appointed vestibule, lobbies, and gallery.

In analyzing the published plans of the 1920s better-class apartment buildings, interior plans tended to fall into four plan types: a common-corridor plan with a small number of units per floor arranged in a linear fashion off a long hall with a passenger elevator (usually found in buildings with a block-like massing); a one-unit per floor plan (usually found in narrow buildings with a block-like massing and one principal façade); the cluster plan, with one or two units clustered around a private elevator and foyer (usually found in a freestanding tower); and the duplex plan in which each unit consisted of stacked floors, with public rooms on the lower level and bedrooms on the upper level. Architects were challenged to make each better-class apartment plan like a single-family home. Where earlier apartment houses had a single elevator or elevator bank serving each floor with all apartments accessed off one long corridor (common-corridor plan), some architects experimented with a cluster-like plan with separate elevators opening onto small foyers on each floor, serving only one or a small number of apartment units. Leichenko and Esser designed the Narragansett with three separate elevators, one to serve two units (Units A & B), one to serve the other unit on the floor (Unit C)

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and one service elevator (served all units). The private elevator foyer mimicked a single-family entry vestibule, to create exclusivity and privacy.

In the best apartment designs of the 1910s and 1920s, the units would have a suite of public rooms – that is, the entry hall, parlor, library and dining room – that dominated the front or were sometimes clustered in the center of the apartment. Bedrooms were separated and grouped, together with bathroom(s), off a smaller secondary hall, yet placed where they could still receive light and air. Finally the kitchen, pantry and maid's rooms would be tucked away, usually in the rear, and accessed directly behind the dining room.

Since apartment house design posed new and complex problems for the architect in the early part of the 20th century, the subject was featured in architectural periodicals such as *American Architect*, and in books such as *American Apartment Houses of Today* (1926) and *American Apartment Houses, Hotels, and Apartments of To-day* (1929) both by R. W. Sexton, an associate editor of the *American Architect*. Within the publications, authors addressed specific concerns about the exterior form and interior plans of the tall apartment building, and provided examples of successful designs. The Narragansett was featured in the February 5, 1929 issue of *American Architect* and in R.W. Sexton's 1929 book, *American Apartment Houses, Hotels, and Apartment Hotels of Today* as a modern apartment house design that successfully met its requirements.

Architects who designed apartments of the better class had to adeptly address unique design concerns mostly based on the profitability and salability of units. Often a building was judged solely on the individual units, not the façade, and had to have amenities and embellishments such as premium materials, improved finish, and high-quality workmanship. Size did matter to the luxury apartment dweller, and architects of the 1920s attempted to provide generous spaces within the unit, or in smaller spaces the illusion of spaciousness was created. At the Narragansett, architects Leichenko and Esser created 1450-1600 square foot apartments that expressed spaciousness by having the apartment entrances from a small private elevator foyer into a much larger gallery within the unit. Once inside, the apartment space was divided into public rooms, private rooms and service areas. The architects used a cluster arrangement, with the entry hall or gallery being the central focus, with principal rooms accessed through wide archways from this space to impart bigger spaces. Bedroom wings were accessed through single doorways often through rear halls that included access to one bathroom per bedroom.

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LEICHENKO AND ESSER, ARCHITECTS AND ENGINEERS

The Chicago architectural firm of Leichenko and Esser was commissioned to design plans for the Narragansett Apartments in 1928. Architects Peter M. Leichenko (1893-d. April 22, 1962, Chicago, IL) and Curt A. Esser (b. July 1, 1892, Chicago, IL – d. January 1984, Chicago, IL) began their partnership in 1921 that lasted until 1953 when both went into individual practices. Not much is known about Peter M. Leichenko, except that he was likely an engineer by training. Curt August Esser was educated at Hoyne Technical High School, the Young Men's Christian Association, and the Beaux Arts Society of Architects, all in Chicago. His professional training as a draftsman included work with Chicago architects Edwin L. Downs (1911-1912), John D. Chubb (1912-1913), the noted architectural firm of Perkins, Fellows, and Hamilton (1913-1915), Paul Gerhardt (1915-1917) and the J. C. Llewellyn Company (1917-1921). He was a registered architect in the State of Illinois, a member of the Illinois Society of Architects, and a member of the American Institute of Architects. In 1921, Curt Esser teamed up with Peter M Leichenko to form an architectural practice that focused on multi-family residential architecture.

Leichenko and Esser was a notable Chicago architectural firm whose apartment building work was nationally published as examples of successful designs. In R. W. Sexton's *Apartment Houses of Today* (1926), the Tudor Manor Apartments, Chicago, IL, a courtyard building, was noted for its various stairways that lead to the apartments in different parts of the building; the Yates Apartments, Chicago, IL, a courtyard building that was featured for its design on an unusually-shaped lot in which every room has an outside window; and The Mayfield Apartments, Chicago, IL, a courtyard building, was noted for its bays that allowed a maximum number of windows that overlook a large central court. Four years later, in R. W. Sexton's *American Apartment Houses, Hotels, and Apartment Hotels of To-day*, some of their more notable larger apartment designs were featured: The Narragansett Apartments with its clustered plans and soaring Art Deco skyscraper verticality; the Lakeside Apartments, an eight-story Gothic building with a clustered plan but with a central court, and the Washington Pine Apartments, a seven-story kitchenette apartment building with a common-corridor plan.

Leichenko and Esser were one of a number of firms noted by Westfall as architects "adept in the specialized skills that made these (apartment building) ventures profitable" (Westfall, *From Homes to Towers*, p. 287). Skillful apartment building architects of the 1920s include the

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master, Benjamin Marshall, William Ernest Walker, prolific Robert DeGolyer (designer of the Powhatan), Walter W. Ahlschlager, Fugard and Knapp, McNally and Quinn, Rissman and Hirshfeld, Hooper and Janusch, Huszagh and Hill, B. Leo Steif, Raymond Gregori, and Philip Maher.

After dissolving the firm in the early 1950s, Peter Leichenko formed the architectural firm of Leichenko and Associates, Inc. that is known for designing the Michigan Huron Building at 679 N. Michigan Avenue in Chicago and their 1950s designs for J. C. Penney Department stores in the Midwest.

The following is a list of known works by Leichenko and Esser:

Edgemere Beach Hotel, North Shore Drive, South Haven, MI (1923-28) demolished
Tudor Manor Apartments, Chicago, IL (1925)
Siegel Apartment Building, corner Jackson Boulevard and Central Park Avenue, Chicago, IL (1925)
240 E. Delaware Place Building, Chicago, IL (1926) demolished
Bnai Israel Synagogue, 5433-5435 W. Jackson Boulevard, Chicago, IL (1927)
McCrary Store, 32-34 South State Street, Chicago, IL (1928-29)
Narragansett Apartments, 1640 E. 50th Street, Chicago, IL (1928-1930)
Commercial Building, 2764-66 N. Milwaukee Avenue, Chicago, IL (1929)
Sixty-ninth and Crandon Apartment Building, southwest corner of 69th Street and Crandon, Chicago, IL (1929-1930)
Commercial Building at 2800-2808 N. Milwaukee Avenue, Chicago, IL (1930)
Commercial Building at 1600-1608 W. Belmont Avenue, Chicago, IL (1930)
Office Building at 6350-6358 N. Broadway, Chicago, IL (1930)
Commercial Building, 3127 N. Lincoln Avenue, Chicago, IL (1932)
National Tea Company Store and Loft Addition and alteration with a new front elevation, 2341-43 W. Devon Avenue, Chicago, IL (1932-33)
Stineway Drug Company Store, Chicago, IL (1936)
American-Marietta Building, 101 E. Ontario, Chicago, IL (1951) demolished
Washington Pine Apartments, 5501 W. Washington, Chicago, IL (date unknown)
Yates Apartments, address unknown, Chicago, IL, (date unknown)

ART DECO ARCHITECTURE

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Leichenko and Esser designed the Narragansett during the heyday of the Art Deco style in America. The architecture of the Art Deco period is most often associated with soaring skyscrapers and modern age design. However, in an era of Art Deco-style commercial and office skyscraper buildings, the Narragansett is one of just a small number of modernistic, tall apartment buildings that were constructed in Chicago in this style from the 1920s up through 1930. Art Deco is a 20th-century style characterized by a linear, angular composition, often with a vertical emphasis and highlighted with stylized decoration. The style was brought about by developments in steel construction and the use of modern materials such as reinforced concrete in the early decades of the twentieth century. Hard-edge, low relief ornamentation is often found around door and window openings and along the roof edges or parapet. Stone and metal are common materials and geometric form is emphasized. The style was popular from the 1920s through about 1940. Many of the decorative elements are non-structural, such as stylized panels, spandrels, sculptures and reliefs or in the generous use of polychromy in terra cotta ornament, metal, paint, stone or stained glass.

Two major events shaped the popularity of the Art Deco style in America: the Chicago Tribune Competition in 1922 and the Paris Exposition of 1925. The Chicago Tribune Tower competition in 1922 gave momentum to the style. Although the first prize went to a Gothic design, the Art Deco second place design by Finnish-born architect Eliel Saarinen was the one that was widely publicized and greatly influenced other American architects of the 1920s. His design, in contrast with the neo-Gothic influenced winning design by Raymond Hood and John Mead Howells, was decidedly modernistic while the Hood and Howells design paralleled the historic eclecticism that dominated American architecture in the 1920s. According to Brugemann in Chicago History (Fall 1980):

“Saarinen had solved the problem [of composing the skyscraper façade] by making a number of small setbacks and unifying them by the continuous deep channels of windows between the wall surfaces and by eliminating all horizontal stops. They tended to follow the vertical lines straight up to the top of the building, minimizing the breaks in massing and emphasizing the verticality.”

It appears that Leichenko and Esser were influenced by Saarinen's second place design for the Tribune Tower in their use of vertical lines that ran the entire height of the building to emphasize verticality, and in using channels of windows.

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In 1925, the art deco style gained popularity through the Exposition Internationale de Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes. The exposition effectively spotlighted the design movement, influenced later design, and gave the style its name. From April to October 1925 in Paris, the fair showcased individual artists, commercial and industrial establishments from over twenty nations.

Some of the finest examples of the Art Deco style are distinctively urban. The style was often symbolically used in office buildings, but in American cities such as New York, Los Angeles and Chicago, 1920s tall multi family dwelling buildings were also designed in the Art Deco style. Most apartment buildings in Chicago tended to be traditional in architectural vocabulary, often to blend with single-family domestic architecture. However, there were those architects that felt that the modern apartment building should express its modernism in modern style and forms. The Art Deco, although traditional enough to blend with other domestic buildings, was also appropriately modern. The few examples in Chicago of multi-family high-rise residential architecture in the Art Deco style include The Lawson YMCA at 20-34 W. Chicago Avenue (1932, Perkins, Chatten, and Hammond), a 24-story, apartment hotel with small kitchenette units and a stepped design; 1260 N. Astor (1930, Philip Maher) and 1301 N. Astor (1929, Philip Maher) two luxury apartment buildings at the intersection of Goethe and Astor in the Gold Coast that were more influenced by the Art Moderne; The Powhatan at 4950 S. Chicago Beach Drive (1927-29, Robert S. DeGolyer), and the Narragansett. The architects who did experiment with the style for apartment uses created soaring buildings with stepped terracing and inserted brightly colored elements that contrasted with stone sheathing. The Narragansett, along with The Powhatan, the neighboring apartment building to the east, are two of the finest examples in Chicago. As a pair, they command the south lakefront through their forceful stone presence and verticality and are masterfully adorned with modern polychromatic terra cotta panels by artist and architect, Charles L. Morgan.

ORNAMENTAL DESIGN OF THE NARRAGANSETT

Pure modernists of the 1920s adamantly rejected traditional ornament. However, a number of modernists could not discard embellishment entirely and began to create distinctively modern ornament. The popular Art Deco style was one modern style that embraced ornament rather than rejecting it. Although inspired by the Machine Age, the forms were expressed in traditional ways: Art Deco ornamentation is a mixture of "mechanistic abstractions" and

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“popular, naturalistic, and historical motifs” borrowed from the traditional. The designs were smooth and geometric, resulting in a modernistic character. In the Narragansett, the terra cotta ornament that graces the building is integral to the design. The free use of polychromatic, abstract terra cotta panels combined with terra cotta panels with Native American motifs set in black backgrounds contrast with the stone clad exterior. Native American motifs were often adapted by architects who were designing Art Deco buildings, as is found in the Narragansett Apartments. In the 1910s and 1920s, American artists began to borrow forms from Native American culture. The artist communities in Taos and Santa Fe, New Mexico of the mid-1910s and 1920s may have influenced the use of Native American motifs in American design.

Although one cannot pinpoint the impetus for Native American motifs in the Art Deco, it has been suggested that Euro-Americans were looking for a national identity that was increasingly identified with the indigenous, or true American people, the Native Americans. More often than not, however, the motifs were clearly European interpretations of Native Americans and not accurate representations of their culture. The Narragansett Tribe, for whom the building is named, is an existing federally recognized tribe in southern New England, with most members residing in the state of Rhode Island. Like all other southern New England Indians, the Narragansett spoke related languages of the eastern Algonquian family. The name Narragansett refers to both a place and the people who lived there and it is believed that it means “people of the little points and bays” or “at the small narrow point of land.” After some study of current Narragansett culture, it appears that there is no link between the ornamental designs found on the building and the Narragansett Tribe. Two major symbols of the tribe, the turtle and the spruce tree, are not found as any of the motifs depicted on the terra cotta panels or other ornamental work. Charles Morgan, like other designers of his time, adapted symbols that were not accurate but generic interpretations of Native American culture. Nevertheless, Native American designs gave inspiration to those creating new, modern ornament.

The ornamental terra cotta panels on the Narragansett were created by the American Terra Cotta Company of Chicago, founded in 1881 and one of the largest, and best known American manufacturers of architectural terra cotta. Although the first use of terra cotta in the United States came around 1860, glazed terra cotta use was popularized between 1890 and 1930. Many builders used stock designs for cornices, moldings, and decorative panels. However, for the Narragansett, the terra cotta panels were custom created and designed by architect Charles L. Morgan. A record of his work is found through photographs crated from the original negatives of the Narragansett's ornamental panels that show the panels prior to firing. The

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records, shop drawings, and photographs of the company now are housed in a collection at Northwest Architectural Archives at the University of Minnesota.

The terra cotta panels on the Narragansett fall into two types: low relief sculpture in a single color to resemble stone, and flat, polychrome panels with an abstract design that appears painted. The most immediately visible of the low relief sculptures is that of the elephants that sit atop carved stone brackets at the stringcourse line above the building's base. These consist of a large elephant facing front, flanked by a small elephant on either side facing out. This sculpture is freestanding, and appears to be stone. However photographs of it exist as part of the terra cotta collection. There are nine square panels with low relief sculpture that are located between floors four and five. They are surrounded by horizontal black glazed framing on the top of each panel and vertical black glazed framing on the sides and bottom of the panels. The panels include four Native American designs, the face of a maiden with long hair looking forward, the face of a chief in profile, looking left, the face of a chief in profile looking right, and the full figure of a male kneeling and stretching his arm to aim a bow and arrow. There is one panel that depicts a Tree with curling foliage and vertical lines trailing down from the leaves. And there are four panels with animals. One panel has a resting pegasus with rainbows or sunrays behind him; one has a leaping pegasus facing right with a sun behind him and Saturn beneath him; one has a leaping deer facing left with a crescent moon and several stars around him; and one has two deer intertwined with mountains and teepee behind them. Because of the gray color of these sculptures, it seems as though the designer intended for them to appear as carved stone.

The polychrome panels are very different. There are three different designs and each one is composed of three separate panels joined together. The designs consist of an abstract image in black line against a red background in the center. There are three vertical lines on either side of this central image. The colors of these lines are (moving out from the center) white, cream, and black. The images may be representative of something but if, so it hasn't been determined. The center image seems slightly anthropomorphic. Stylistically these images are very much part of the Abstract Expressionist movement in art.

CHARLES L. MORGAN, ARTIST AND ARCHITECT

The terra cotta panels that appear on the primary facades of the Narragansett were designed by Charles L. Morgan, who was recognized both as an artist and architect. Charles Leonard

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Morgan (b. October 13, 1890, Mount Vernon, IL - d. April 5, 1947, Port Richey, FL) was an architect that is best known for his color artistry in his architectural renderings and for his perspective etchings. Although he began his studies at the University of Illinois in electrical engineering, he later transferred into the architecture program, receiving a B.A. in architecture in 1914. He began his career with the architectural firm of Davidson, Lockwood & Morgan, and shortly thereafter opened his office as a freelance artist, mainly producing architectural renderings. In 1918 he began teaching free hand drawing at the University of Illinois. Perhaps Charles Morgan enjoyed teaching, for throughout his career he held positions at institutions such as Kansas State University in Manhattan, KS (Associate Professor of Architecture, 1934-37), University of Kansas (Associate Professor of Aeronautics, 1943), and later in Florida and South America. Morgan was a member of the American Institute of Architects, the Illinois Society of Architects, the Architects Club of Chicago, the Architectural Sketch Club, and the Chicago Society of Etchers.

Beginning in the 1920s, Charles Morgan touted himself as a specialist in the development of modern architecture. As an expert in architectural rendering, he was asked in 1927 to contribute color plates for a series of monthly articles in *Western Architect* designed to stimulate interest in polychromy as applied to architecture. The color plates accompanied articles by Rexford Newcomb, A.I.A., and appeared courtesy of the Terra Cotta Service Bureau of Chicago. The Terra Cotta Service Bureau was an organization maintained by the major American manufacturers of terra cotta including Chicago's American Terra Cotta & Ceramic Company, Midland Terra Cotta Company, and the Northwestern Terra Cotta Company to promote the use of terra cotta in architecture. Morgan's color renderings were a significant marketing tool for the terra cotta companies to sell polychrome ornament for use on walls and trim of buildings built in the late 1920s. Perhaps Charles Morgan's associations with the Terra Cotta Service Bureau led to his commissions with the Powhatan Apartments in conjunction with architect Charles DeGolyer in 1927 and for the Narragansett Apartments in conjunction with architects Leichenko and Esser in 1928. The designs for the Powhatan, done a year earlier than the Narragansett, are notable for Morgan's extraordinary and prolific use of color and the highly original images found on the terra cotta panels.¹⁶ Both buildings share Native American names, as well as exhibit ornament that was inspired by Native American images of the 1910s and 1920s.

¹⁶ Barton. Powhatan Apartments, p. 7.

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Morgan's low relief sculptural terra cotta panels on the Narragansett are original imaginative interpretations of recognizable themes. They fit squarely within the tradition of ornamentation that expressed traditional images in a stylized manner. This follows a long line of representational sculpture in Chicago architecture originating so eloquently with Louis Sullivan. Here in the Narragansett, the Native American-inspired designs are stylized consistent with Art Deco sensibility. Morgan's polychrome panels seem to be a more innovative visual statement in architecture. Although the designs are reflective of the Abstract Expressionist movement whose roots were in Germany but rose to prominence in New York from the 1920s, the use of painted panels of this type is unusual on a building. Rather than sculpture, these panels appear as colorful paintings up the sides of the structure. The three different designs are mixed in arrangement on the two facades of the structure, making it difficult at first to determine just how many unique designs there are. By combining his artistic and architectural talents, Morgan was able to collaborate with Leichenko and Esser to successfully unite original decorative art, through the use of architectural terra cotta, with skyscraper design of the 1920s.

Charles Morgan continued collaborative efforts with Leichenko and Esser with the National Tea Company Store at 2341-43 W. Devon Avenue in Chicago, IL, a remodeling and expansion of a 40x68 foot building to a 40x125 building once occupied by the former North Town State Bank.

Charles Morgan had established relationships with other architects including Frank Lloyd Wright.¹⁷ In 1931, Frank Lloyd Wright's drawings for the cover of Liberty Magazine appeared with a set of mosaics by Charles L. Morgan depicting his designs in an exhibition in Europe. Not much else is known about their relationship. Morgan also exhibited his watercolors, lithographs, etchings, pastels, and renderings at the Kroch Gallery in late 1930. Included in this exhibit was a portrait of Frank Lloyd Wright.¹⁸

Other projects by Morgan include working as an associate architect with Alex Capraro for the Italian Building at the Century of Progress Exposition in 1933; as associate architect for the Bahai Temple in Wilmette, IL (he was a member of the Bahai faith); Rainbow Bridge, a whimsical design with rainbow colors and skyscraper piers that was proposed by D.H.

¹⁷ Who's Who in Chicago, 1931, p. 695

¹⁸ "Charles Morgan, Architect, Also Does Etchings." *Chicago Tribune*, September 25, 1930 in the Art Institute of Chicago Scrapbook, October 1930-July 1931, 58:9.

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Burnham & Company for Chicago's Outer Drive and never built;¹⁹ and an "igloo garden house," a small storage out building built with concrete and metal lath in the shape of an igloo that he hoped would be mass-produced.²⁰ In later years, he worked on many projects in South America, continued teaching, and returned to Chicago in the mid-1940s. He was decorated with the Chevalier of the Crown of Italy in 1934 and the author of a 1927 book *Color Sketches, Spain, France and England* produced by the *Western Architect*. Architectural artist Charles Morgan died in a drowning accident while vacationing in Port Richey, FL on April 5, 1947. He was 56 years old.

CONCLUSION

According to Carl Condit, many of the urban hotels and apartment buildings erected in Chicago before 1930 were much more noteworthy for their size than for their architectural merit. He believed a high quality design would be seen in an apartment building's regular rhythms, excellent scale and proportion, solid construction, fine workmanship, and often imaginative and efficient floor plans (Condit, Chicago 1910-29, p. 151.) The Narragansett is noteworthy because there was much attention given to the design of both the exterior façade skin and the interior plan elements. The interior plan caters to the needs of residents seeking spacious, luxury units in a multi-family building. The exterior skillfully combines a traditional approach at the base with the soaring Art Deco verticality of the floors rising above it. The rhythmic use of terra cotta panels in two very different design languages reinforces the combination of traditional and modern in one structure.

¹⁹ "Rainbow Bridge Suggested for Outer Drive." *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, January 15, 1928 in the Art Institute of Chicago's Scrapbook on Architecture, p. 959.

²⁰ His idea was published in an article by Charles L. Morgan entitled "Igloos are Cheaper and Easy to Build" in the Art Institute of Chicago's Scrapbook on Architecture, p. 796. He thought this building would be useful to farmers.

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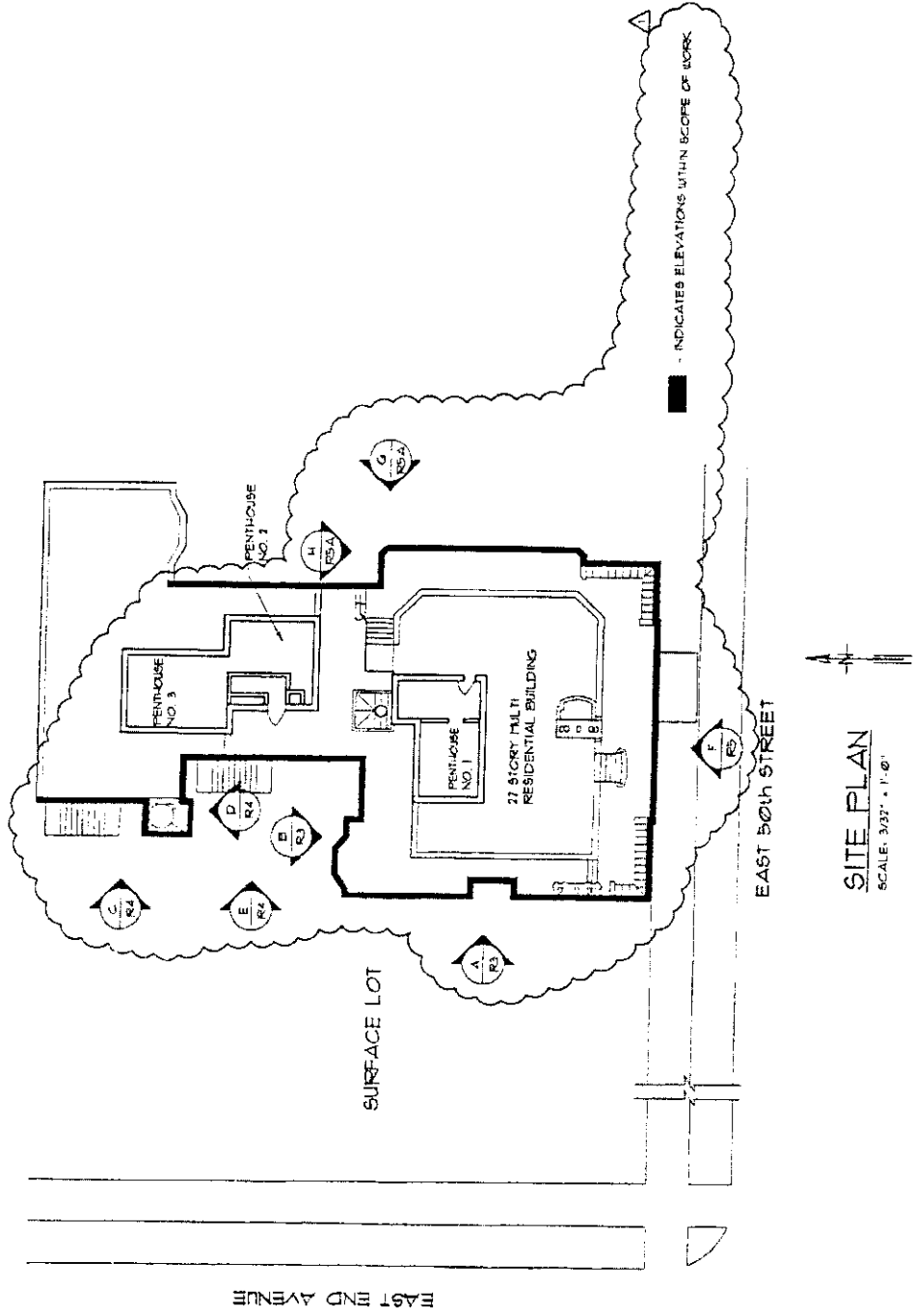
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P.I.N.: 20-12-103-010-1001 through 20-12-103-010-1071.

Legal Description: West 76 feet of the East 200 feet of the South 125 feet of Block 2 in Chicago Beach Addition, a sub of Lot "A" in Beach Hotel Company's Consolidation (of certain tracts in Fractional Sections 21 & 22-38-14) in Section 12, Township 38 North, Range 14 East of the Third Principal Meridian, in Cook County, Illinois.

Verbal Boundary Justification

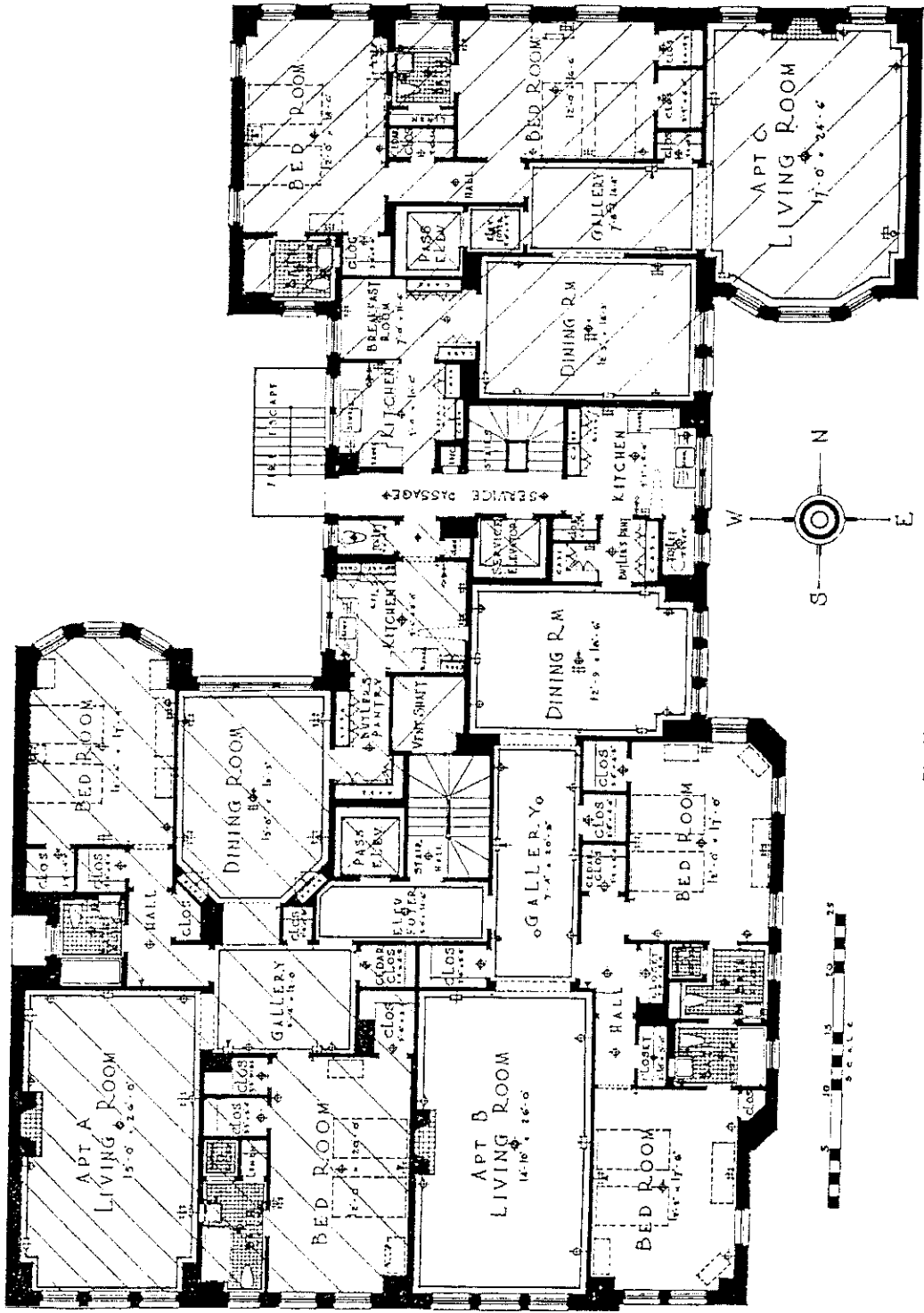
The property includes the entire parcel commonly known as 1640 East Fiftieth Street in Chicago, Illinois.



The Narragansett
 1640 East 50th Street, Chicago
 Site plan by Klein and Hoffman, Inc., Chicago, IL

SITE PLAN
 SCALE: 3/32" = 1'-0"

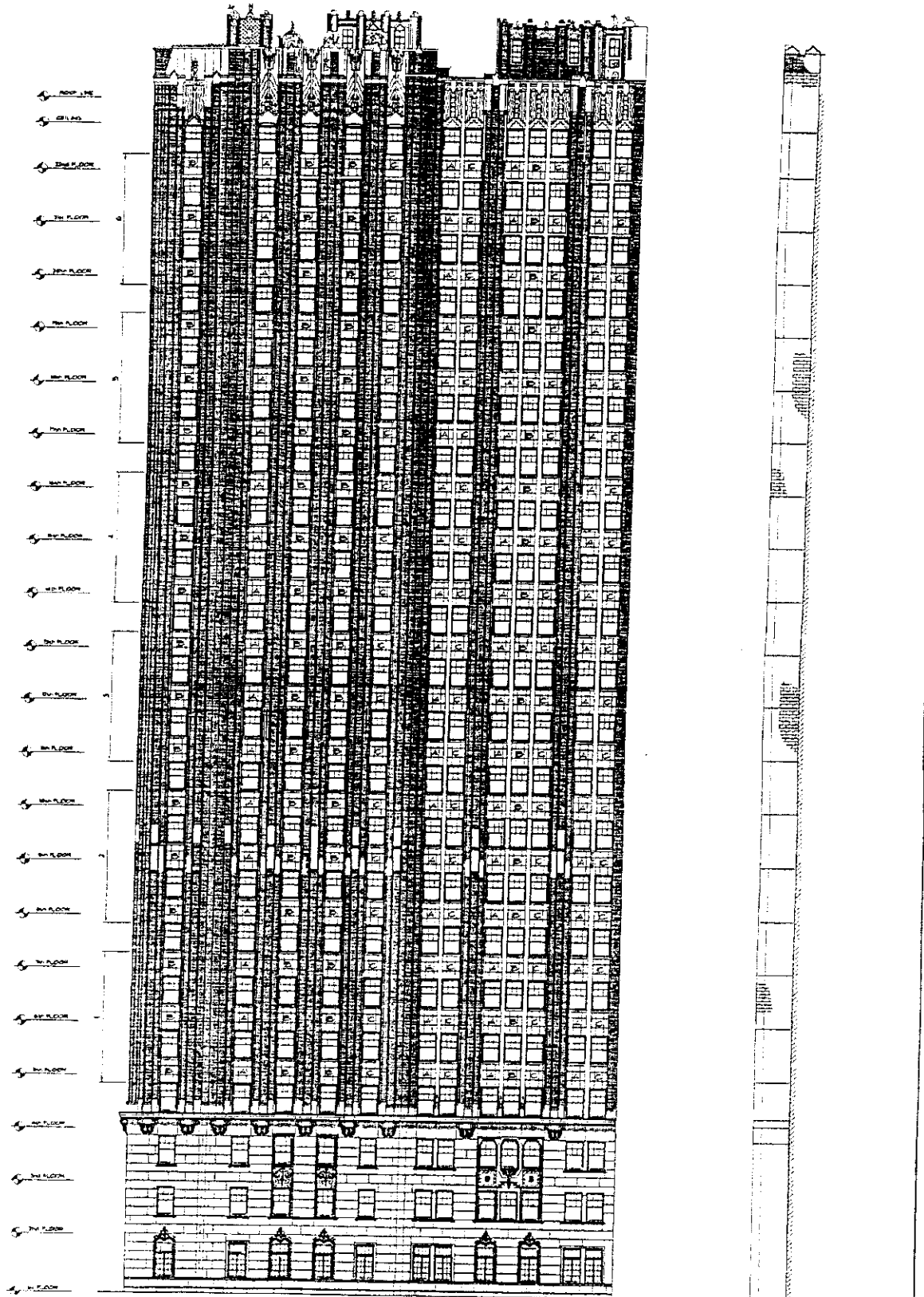
Floor plan, Narragansett Apartments, 1640 East 50th Street, Chicago, Cook County, IL
 AMERICAN APARTMENT HOUSES



PLAN OF TYPICAL FLOOR

NARRAGANSETT APARTMENTS,
 CHICAGO, ILL.

LECHENKO AND ESSER,
 ARCHITECTS.



DROP #3 DROP #6 DROP #7 DROP #5

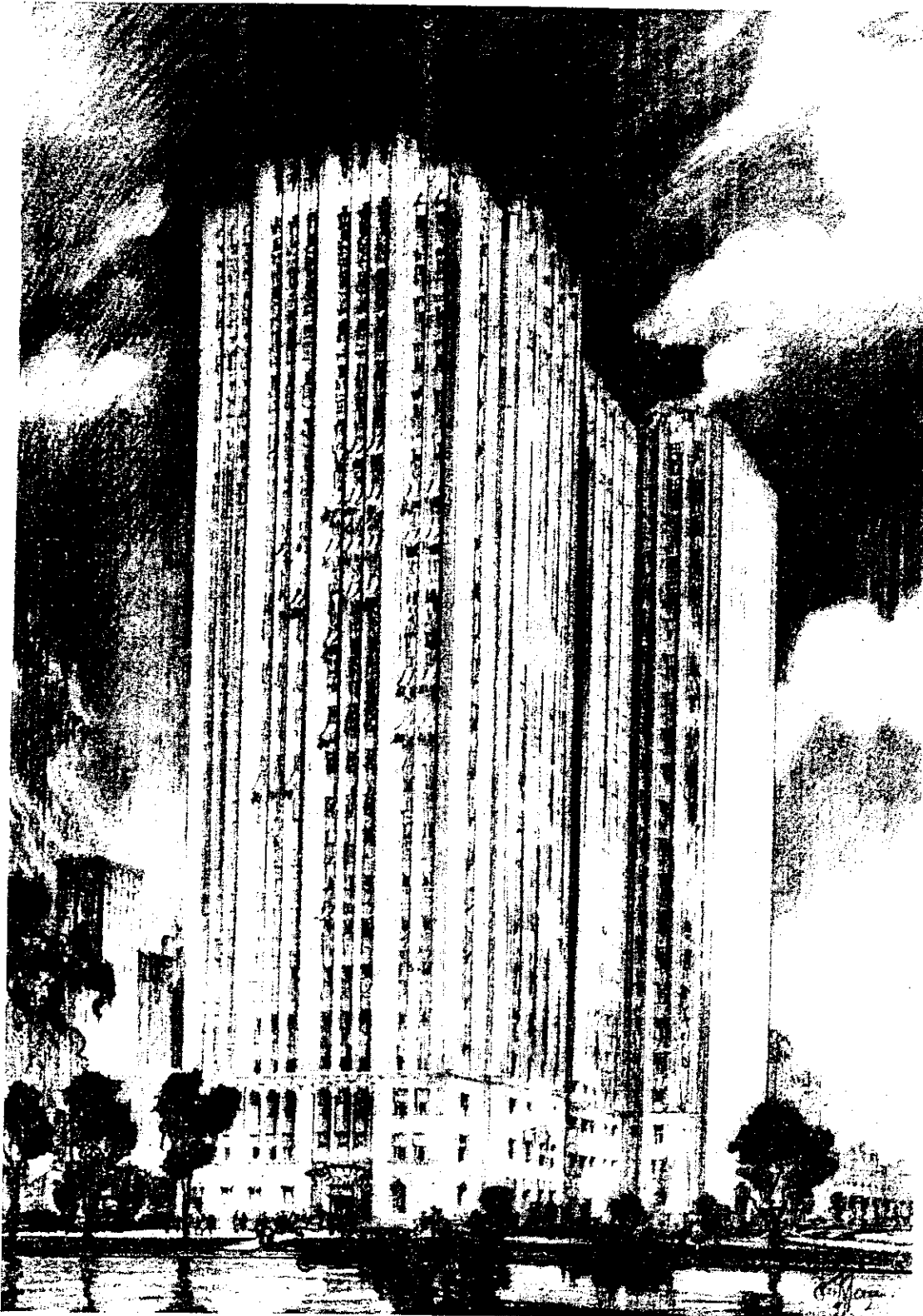
EAST ELEVATION
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EAST RETURN ELEVATION
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"

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321	2/1/68	REVISED
322	2/15/68	REVISED
323	3/1/68	REVISED
324	3/15/68	REVISED
325	4/1/68	REVISED
326	4/15/68	REVISED
327	5/1/68	REVISED
328	5/15/68	REVISED

AMERICAN APARTMENT HOUSES

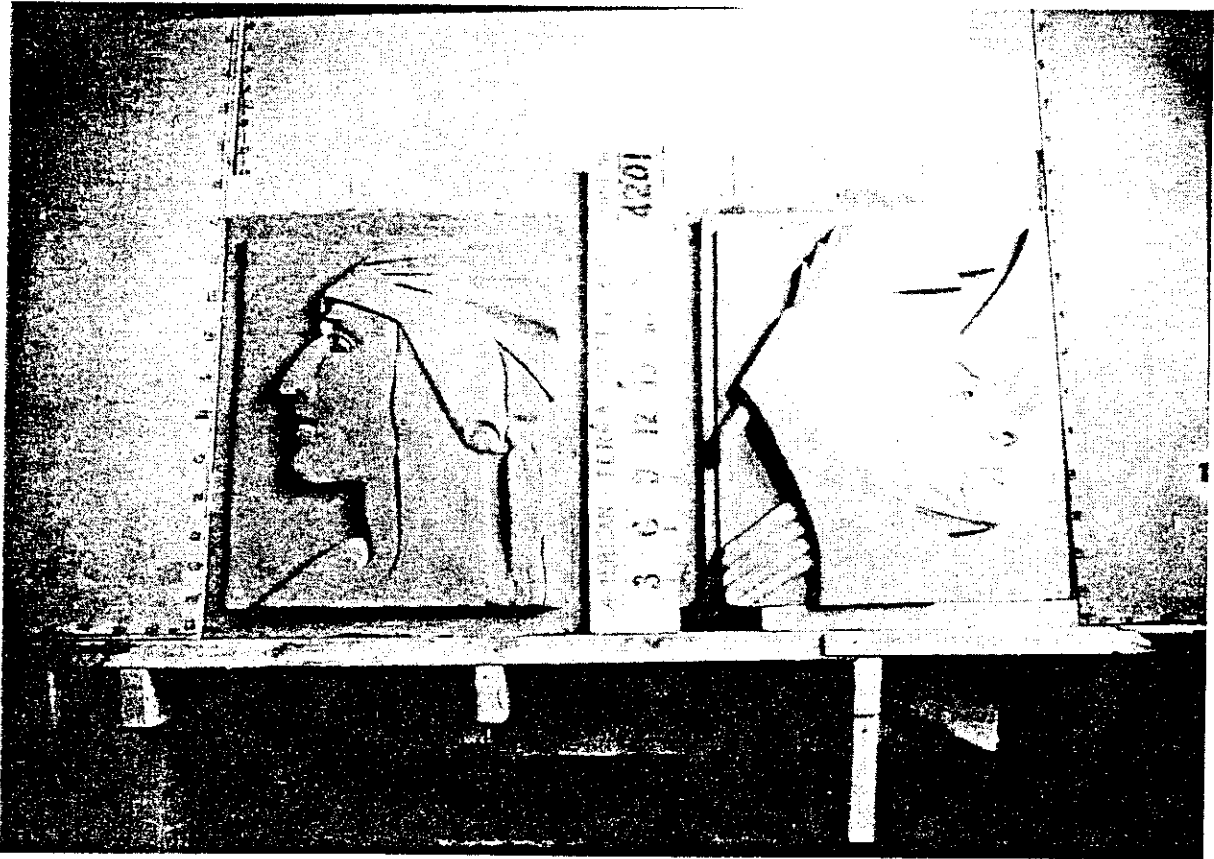


NARRAGANSETT APARTMENTS,
CHICAGO, ILL.

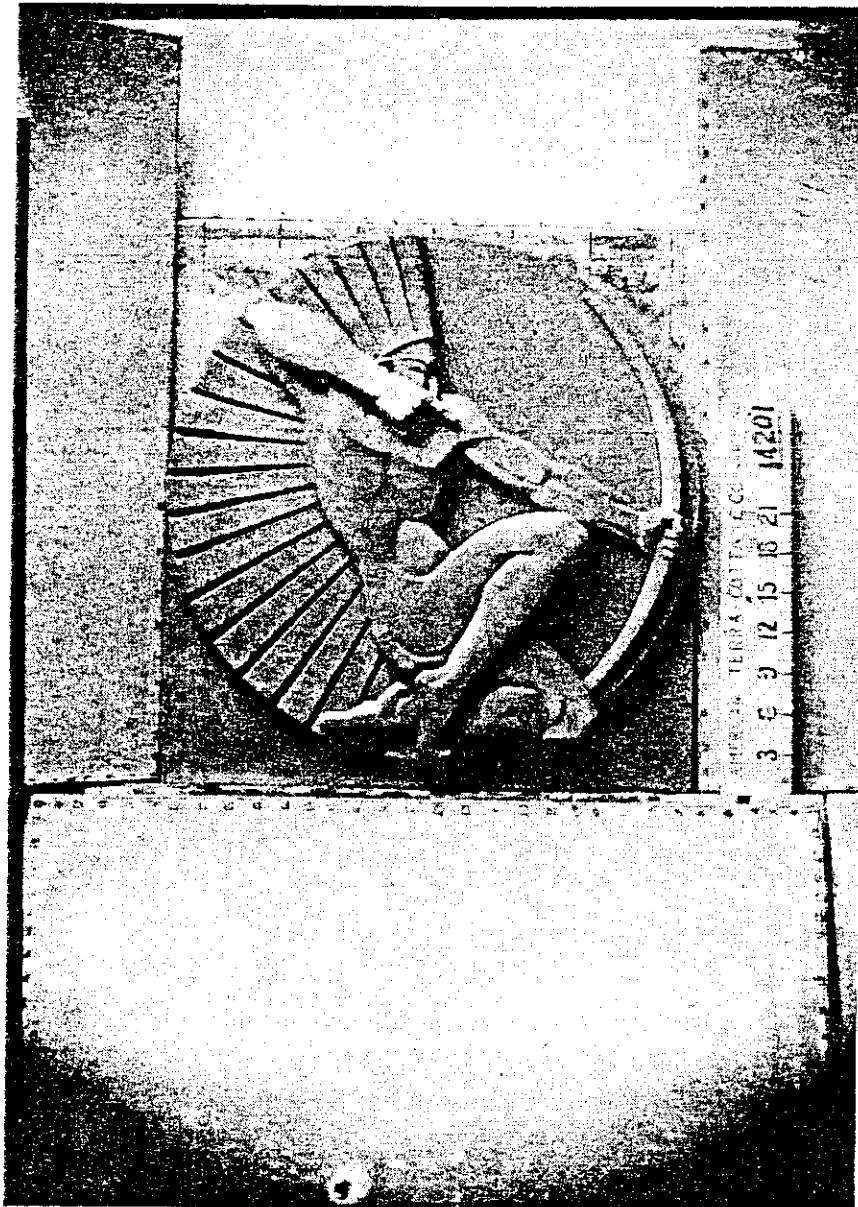
LEICHENKO AND ESSER,
ARCHITECTS.

Detail Photographs from the
American Terra Cotta Papers
Northwest Architectural Archives
University of Minnesota

The Narragansett Apartments
Job #4201



DETAIL PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE AMERICAN TERRA COTTA PAPERS. NORTHWEST ARCHITECTURAL ARCHIVES.
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA. THE NARRAGANSETT APARTMENTS, JOB #4201
THE NARRAGANSETT, CHICAGO, COOK COUNTY, ILLINOIS



DETAIL PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE AMERICAN TERRA COTTA PAPERS. NORTHWEST ARCHITECTURAL ARCHIVES,
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA. THE NARRAGANSETT APARTMENTS. JOB #4201
THE NARRAGANSETT, CHICAGO, COOK COUNTY, ILLINOIS



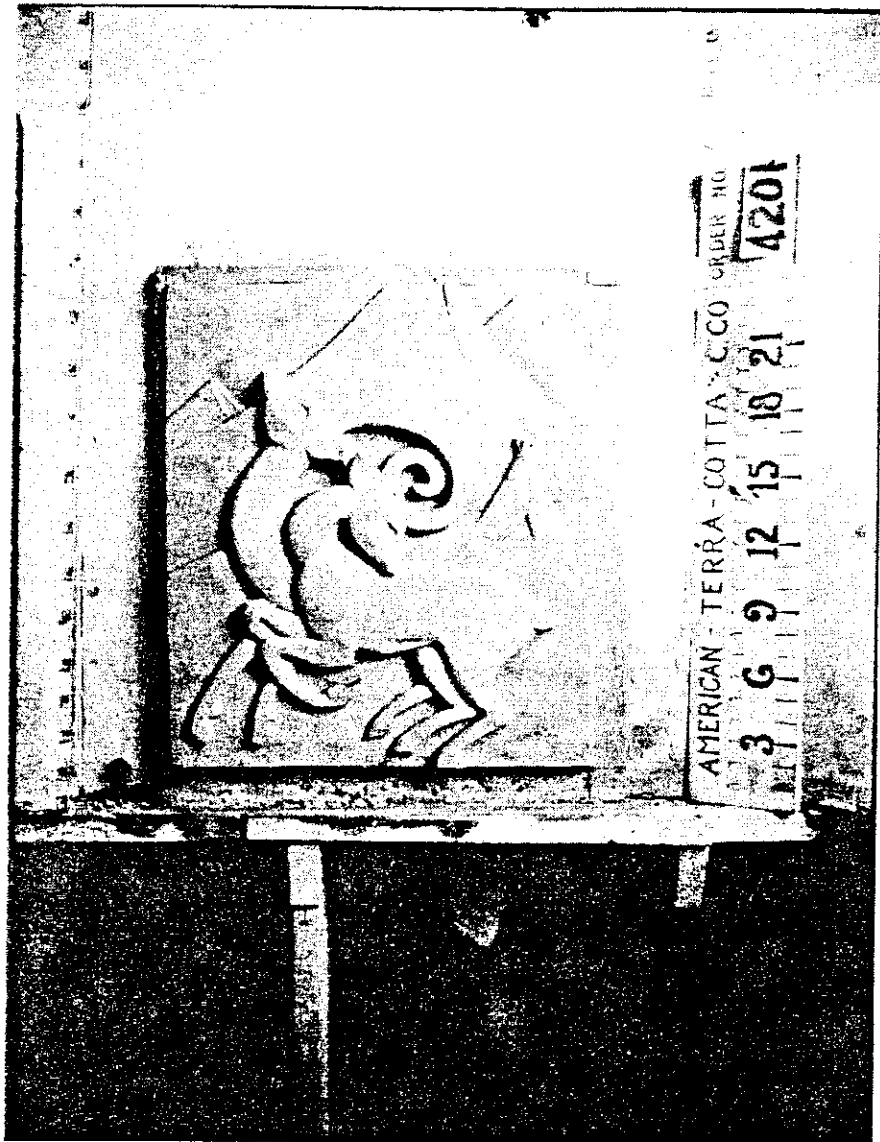
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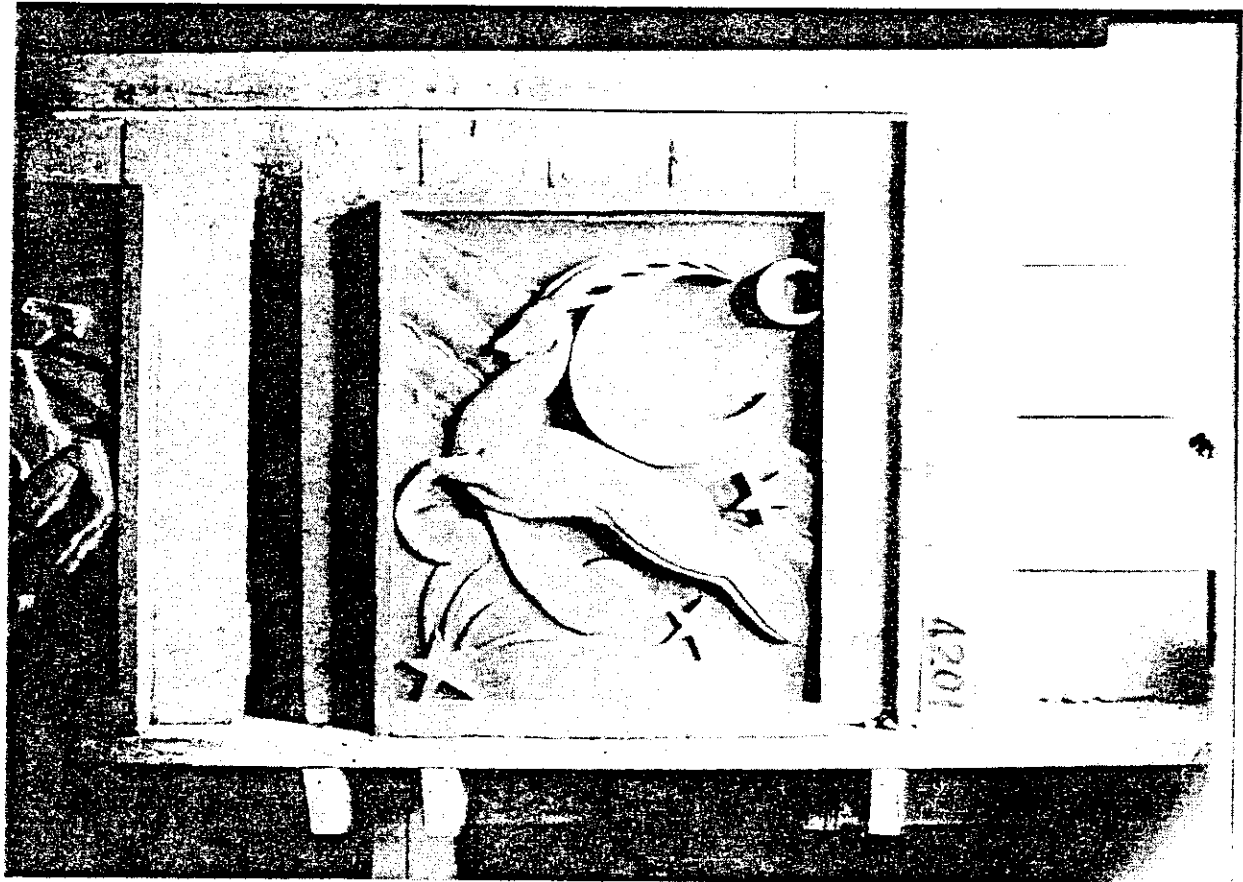
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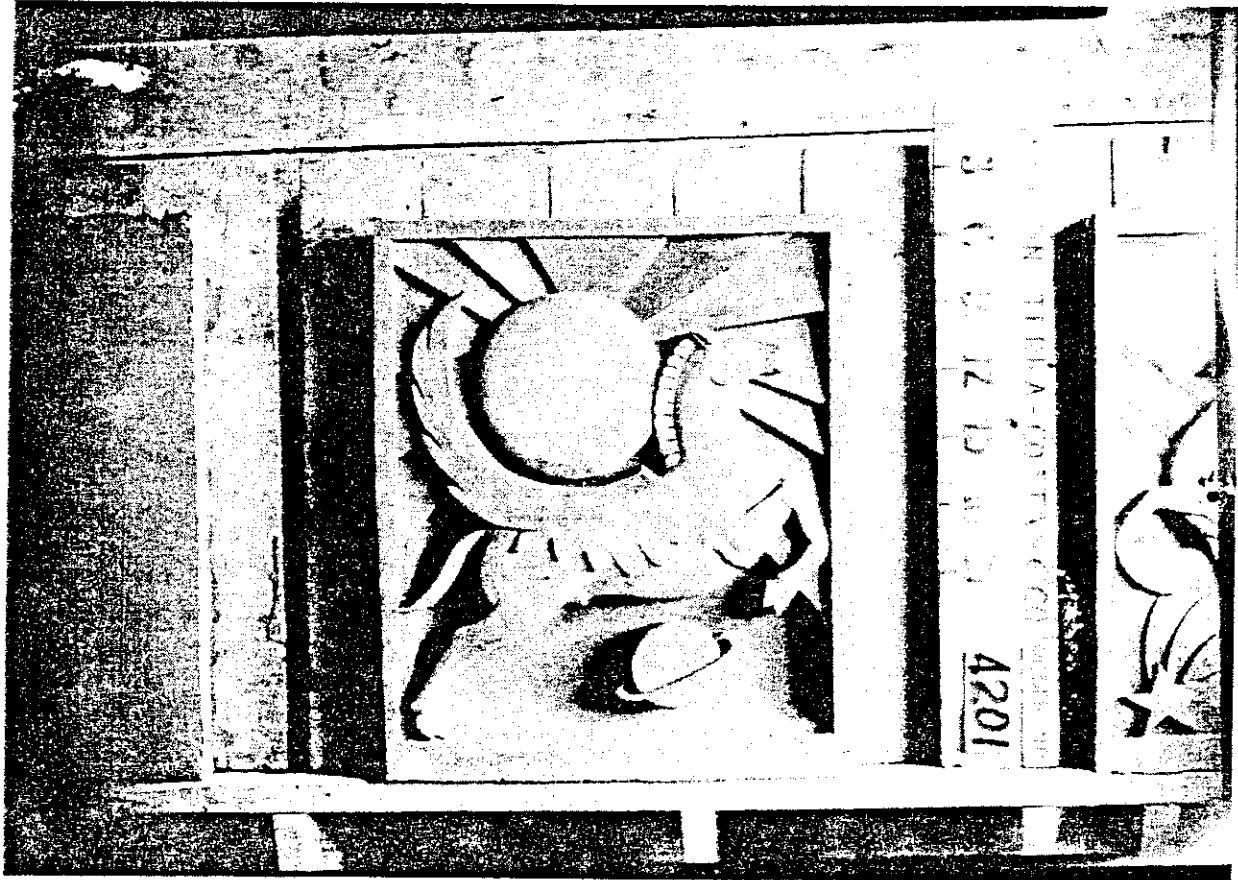
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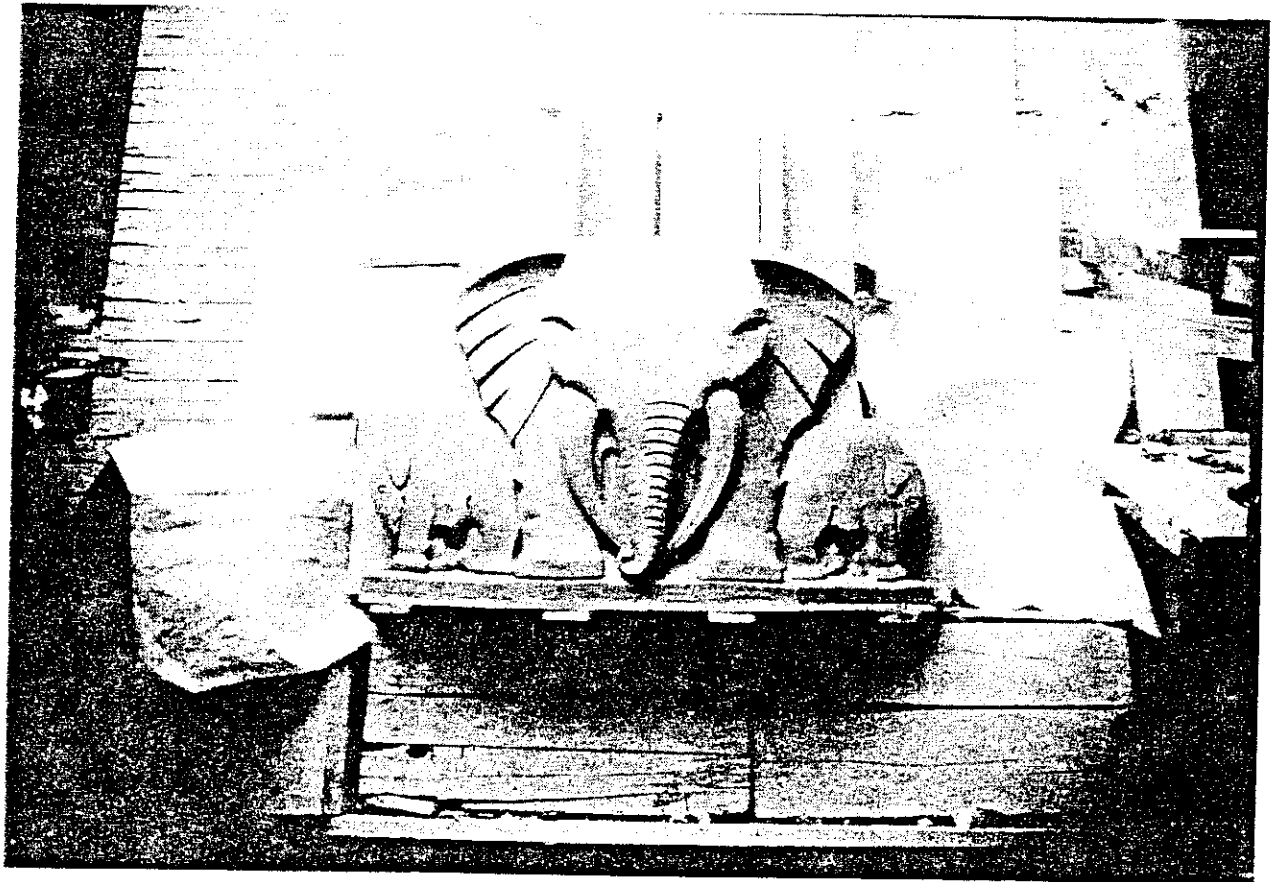
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THE NARRAGANSETT, CHICAGO, COOK COUNTY, ILLINOIS



City of Chicago
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Planning
and Development

Denise M. Casalino, P.E.
Commissioner

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33 North LaSalle Street
Chicago, Illinois 60602
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(312) 744-9140 (FAX)
(312) 744-2578 (TTY)
<http://www.cityofchicago.org>

December 6, 2004

Tracey A. Sculle
Survey & National Register Coordinator
Illinois Historic Preservation Agency
1 Old State Capitol
Springfield, IL 62702

Re: Chicago nominations to the National Register of Historic Places for

- **Chicago Club, 81 E. Van Buren**
- **Garden Homes Historic District, roughly bounded by S. Wabash Ave., E. 87th St., S. Indiana Ave., and E. 89th St.**
- **The Narragansett, 1640 E. 50th St.**

Dear Ms. Sculle:

This is in response to your letters of September 8 and November 3, 2004, to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks asking for the Commission's comments on the nominations of the properties referenced above to the National Register of Historic Places. As a Certified Local Government (CLG), the City of Chicago is given the opportunity to comment on local nominations to the National Register prior to being considered by the Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council.

At its regular meeting of December 2, 2004, the Commission voted unanimously to support the National Register listings for all three nominations. The Commission's resolution is attached.

Please contact Terry Tatum of my staff at 312-744-9147 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Brian Goeken
Deputy Commissioner
Landmarks Division

Originated by:

Terry Tatum
Director of Research
Landmarks Division

encl.

cc: Alderman Madeline L. Haithcock, 2nd Ward
Alderman Toni Preckwinkle, 4th Ward
Alderman Freddrenna M. Lyle, 6th Ward
Jennifer Kenney and Victoria Granicki, Granicki Historical Consultants
Jean Guarino
Susan Benjamin and Jean Follett, Benjamin Historic Certifications
Chicago Club
David Guyer, Narragansett Condominium Association
Judy Minor-Jackson, Department of Planning and Development
Terri Haymaker, Department of Planning and Development



Resolution
by the
Commission on Chicago Landmarks
on the
Nominations to the National Register of Historic Places
for

Chicago Club, 81 E. Van Buren

**Garden Homes Historic District,
Roughly bounded by S. Wabash Ave. , E. 87th St., S. Indiana Ave., and E. 89th St.**

The Narragansett, 1640 E. 50th St.

December 2, 2004

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks finds that:

- the Chicago Club meets Criterion A for commerce, social history, and entertainment and recreation and Criterion C for architecture as a handsome Romanesque Revival-style club building housing a club of significance to the history of Chicago; and that
- the Garden Homes Historic District meets Criterion A for community planning and development as Chicago's first large-scale subsidized housing project; and that
- the Narragansett meets Criteria C for architecture as an excellent Art Deco-style high-rise apartment building.

Now, therefore, be it resolved by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks that it hereby supports the listing of all three nominations to the National Register of Historic Places.



**Illinois Historic
Preservation Agency**

1 Old State Capitol Plaza • Springfield, Illinois 62701-1507 • Teletypewriter Only (217) 524-7128

Voice (217) 782-4836

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Mayor Richard M. Daley, City of Chicago
Brian Goeken, Landmarks Division, Department of Planning and
Development

FROM: Tracey A. Sculle, Survey and National Register Coordinator *TAS*

DATE: September 8, 2004

SUBJECT: Preliminary Opinion for The Narragansett

The Narragansett located at 1640 East Fiftieth Street in Chicago meets Criterion C for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. This building was built between 1928 and 1930, as part of the Chicago Beach Development and is an excellent example of Art Deco applied to large scale apartment buildings in the Kenwood community area. The Narragansett was designed by the Chicago architectural firm of Leichenko and Esser with terra cotta ornamentation designed by artist and architect Charles Morgan and produced by the American Terra Cotta Company. The building compares favorably with other Art Deco structures in the area including Powhattan Apartments, which was designated a local landmark in 1993. The period of significance for the apartment is from 1928-1930, when it was constructed. In my opinion, The Narragansett clearly conveys its architectural significance and retains sufficient integrity to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

suggestions for listing places associated with historic landscape architecture in the National Register of Historic Places.

WEEKLY LIST OF ACTIONS TAKEN ON PROPERTIES: 4/18/05 THROUGH 4/22/05

KEY: State, County, Property Name, Address/Boundary, City, Vicinity, Reference Number, NHL, Action, Date, Multiple Name

ALABAMA, MOBILE COUNTY,
Church Street East Historic District (Boundary Increase),
66 and 68 S. Royal St.,
Mobile, 05000289,
LISTED, 4/20/05

ALABAMA, ST. CLAIR COUNTY,
Ashville Historic District,
Bounded by AL 23, Greensport Rd., 8th Ave., Waldrop Dr., AL 231, and 5th St.,
Ashville, 05000288,
LISTED, 4/20/05

FLORIDA, FLAGLER COUNTY,
Dixie Highway--Hastings, Espanola and Bunnell Road,
Roughly Espanola (Flagler County to Cty Rte 204 (St. Johns County),
Espanola vicinity, 05000311,
LISTED, 4/20/05

FLORIDA, ST. JOHNS COUNTY,
St. Augustine Civic Center,
10 Castillo Dr.,
St. Augustine, 05000316,
LISTED, 4/21/05
(Florida's New Deal Resources MPS)

FLORIDA, VOLUSIA COUNTY,
Ormond Yacht Club,
63 N. Beach St.,
Ormond Beach, 05000310,
LISTED, 4/19/05

ILLINOIS, COOK COUNTY,
Narragansett, The,
1640 E. Fiftieth St.,
Chicago, 05000107,
LISTED, 4/18/05

INDIANA, VIGO COUNTY,
Twelve Points Historic District,
Lafayette Ave. from Linden to 13th st. and Maple Ave. from Garfield to 13th
St.,
Terre Haute, 05000314,
LISTED, 4/20/05

INDIANA, WHITLEY COUNTY,
Souder, Dr. Christopher, House,
214 W. Main St.,
Larwill, 05000315,
LISTED, 4/20/05

IOWA, STORY COUNTY,